



*Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you."
(John 20:20-21)*

Easter 2020

To my dear St. George's Family,

I write this to you the day after our province declared a state of emergency in regards to the Corona Virus Pandemic. Borders are closing, stores are shutting down, jobs are being lost, fears are ramping up for personal health, for communal safety and for the economic well being of all. Day by day, St. George's church is responding with our community leaders, and according to the most trusted sources of information and knowledge, in order to make sure that our care for the vulnerable can continue, that we are extending friendship to one another in times of great anxiety, and that we all have ample opportunity to draw close to the love of God—especially in times of stress and crisis—and to hear and feel God's promise of loving care more clearly and powerfully.

I probably don't have to spend a lot of time in this letter regaling you with a recap of all of the bad news. We know this is serious. We know it is likely to get much more serious before it gets better. We know that we are probably talking months, not weeks, before things are "back to normal." We know that the anxiety out there can lead to angry, aggressive behaviour, to stockpiling staples (like toilet paper, of all things!), and to people just generally having a shorter fuse with one another.

As we often say, we need to know the bad news before we can really hear the Good News. Given all of the bad news, our ears should be particularly pricked, ready to be attentive to that Good News in a renewed and intentional way. Here are some of the holy and life-giving things I see unfolding across this tumultuous landscape:

-Although stress and anxiety can bring out the worst in people, it can also bring out the best. Every day, I witness countless examples of how our community is willing to show up for one another, how those who are able are stepping up to get groceries for those stuck at home, how friendship and concern is being extended, and how we are finding ways of strengthening the bonds of community, even as person-to-person contact is being limited.

-I hear people expressing new levels of gratitude. Many of us have had travel plans changed or cancelled. All of us have to worry about the economy, and too many of our households are worried about very significant impacts to financial well-being because of this crisis. We worry about getting sick. We worry about our loved ones getting sick. We worry about people living in shelters and on the streets. And yet, we are also able to see our blessings with newly opened eyes. One person told me that she uses her times of frequent handwashing to say prayers of thanksgiving for her family and friends, for access to clean water and social supports, and for the many people working on the front lines of our health care system to respond to this crisis.

-We do have so many people in our community who are continuing to work because the well-being of all of us depends on them. We have nurses and doctors, truck drivers and plumbers, PSWs,



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counsellors, contractors, and so many others in our midst who have to continue to show up for the sake of others. We have volunteers across our programs who are here to make sure the hungry are fed and those in peril are helped. We have those who are figuring out how to work from home. And we have people who must obey, to the strictest level possible, the call to isolation, and whose willingness to follow these protocols is protecting lives. At the heart of our faith is Jesus' model of sacrificial love. What we need to remember is that the willingness of all of us to make sure that we are following the public health measures put in place is also part of our loving response. We all share in the responsibility of trying to keep our whole community safe.

-The church is most definitely not closed! The church isn't our building, and it's not dependent on our ability to gather in our building. Our church *is us*. Wherever we are, and no matter what measures are put in place, our identity as church continues. We may just need to find other ways of showing up for each other and connecting as a community to God's love.

As important as all of these signs of goodness are, they aren't what we mean when we're talking about Good News. Good News is God's initiative and God's gift. We can certainly participate in how God's goodness and love is made known, but our hope is founded first and foremost in God's activity, not our own. We have no idea, at the time of the writing of this letter, whether we will be at church through Holy Week and for our Easter worship. As I contemplate how different our Holy Week journey and our Easter proclamation might look this year, I am reminded of the Easter evening account in the Gospel according to John. The disciples are locked away in the Upper Room because they are terrified of what could happen to them as followers of a recently executed criminal of the State. Jesus shows up in the middle of their fearful gathering and says "Peace be with you." He breathes on them. He gifts them with the Holy Spirit. They will need that gift because Jesus also commissions them to "be sent" out into the world, to share in the same work which God had anointed Jesus to do. He indicates that this work will centre around forgiveness. Forgiveness, most broadly, is about mending broken relationships, it is about allowing our lives to be brought back to God.

This is the Good News. Jesus isn't deterred by our locked rooms and fearful hearts. Jesus seeks us out in our locked rooms and speaks right into our fearful hearts with God's gift of peace. Jesus commissions us, knowing that wherever we go, whatever we do—OR especially right now, wherever we *can't* go, and whatever we are *not* able to do—the thing that we offer to the world is God's love. Sometimes that means that we can offer God's love in our actions of service. Sometimes that means that we offer God's love simply by being willing to be held in God's love and to receive God's love through the loving service of others.

With that Good News promised to us again, we can face this anxious landscape. We can find that there are blessings enough to make sure that all are cared for in these days ahead. We can be guided by wisdom and love, not fear. We can figure out how to raise our Easter Alleluia and to share in the risen life of Jesus once again, even if the forms our church takes need to adapt and go digital for a time. We can pray: for God to heal us, for God to end the suffering this pandemic is causing, for God to redeem us. We can trust that God's healing and redeeming are guaranteed, whatever the days ahead may hold.

In the peace and love of the risen Christ,

Martha +